

THE STUDY OF MAN

SCIENCE, IDEOLOGY, AND DIALOGUE

The Amsterdam Sociological Congress

NORMAN BIRNBAUM

THE World Congress of Sociology, which met late in August of this year in Amsterdam, if it did nothing else, may have shocked some of the participating sociologists into practicing their discipline on themselves. The Congress began as a venture in science. It developed into a conflict of ideology. The presence of forty representatives from the Communist countries made possible an informal encounter between East and West which absorbed and fascinated the sociologists. By contrast, the formal scholarly discussions on the program seemed somewhat tedious and remote—except when illuminated by flashes of political conflict, occasionally conflict within the West itself. All this implied the question of what sociology was: a science objective and neutral or one affected by social conflict.

The Congress provided the setting for more than an encounter: its theme, "Social Change in the 20th Century," and the claims of sociology to depict society entire, allowed a dialogue between Communist social thinkers and their Western colleagues to open. The conversation started in a faltering and partial way, and the Soviet Russians, as distinct from some of their

satellites, had no part in it. A generation of Stalinism had done its work: the Russians at Amsterdam could only be described, in one observer's words, as Neanderthals. But the Czechs, East Germans, and Poles were quite capable of talking to the rest of us, and were obviously delighted at the opportunity to do so. They belonged, culturally, to the West—as did indeed the old Russian intelligentsia and the Bolsheviks before Stalinism.

Why did we fail to establish contact with the Russians? Sociology as such is proscribed in the Soviet Union. The mixed bunch of official philosophers, philosopher-officials, economists, and publicists who came to the Congress had no acquaintance with the discipline. But they would have been equally lost in their own fields. Social science can develop on a Marxist basis and Marxists have done and are doing useful work in a number of countries, if generally not under Marxist dictatorships. The Russians have no social science, Marxist or otherwise. They have, instead, an ideology which they reiterate upon every occasion.

The encounter with the Russians mostly took the form of collision. But the Czechs, East Germans, and Poles sought out the Westerners and ignored, almost ostentatiously, the Russians. And the whole process was both complicated and facilitated by the fact that some of the Western sociologists present, most notably a number of French and Italians, were themselves Communists, fellow-travelers, or left socialists. Also, a strong Yugoslav delegation was present, and the Yugoslavs are exceedingly experienced in dialogues of all kinds with all camps. The lines were fluid, so fluid at times that many of the participants had to acknowledge, in one way or another, contradictions

NORMAN BIRNBAUM's report on last summer's World Congress of Sociology in Amsterdam reveals at first hand some of the intellectual unrest that only a few months later was to contribute to the Polish defiance of the Kremlin and the Hungarian revolution. Mr. Birnbaum was born in New York City in 1926 and studied at Williams College and Harvard University, where he taught for a time. He now teaches sociology at the London School of Economics and Political Science. This is his first appearance in COMMENTARY.

within their own camps and often found themselves more in agreement with their nominal opponents than with their allies.

Whether polemic or sympathetic exchange, all this dialogue was highly stimulating. But it also carried a lesson. The Amsterdam meetings showed, in a way that the more abstract discussions of the Congress for Cultural Freedom cannot, what the consequences are of political limitations on social inquiry. It dramatized the intellectual utility of freedom.

But the meetings may also have shown that Western sociologists do not invariably make the best use of their freedom. They were divided, at Amsterdam as elsewhere, by a number of conflicts over approach and value. Such conflicts are not necessarily bad; social science, in fact, may thrive on them. But they ought to be faced and explored, and many of the Westerners at Amsterdam seemed unready to do so. We heard the usual arguments, of course, about the scope and methods of sociology. (Henri Poincaré, the mathematician and philosopher of science, once remarked that sociologists were always writing treatises on methods they were scrupulously careful never to apply.) But the disputants, by and large, ignored a fact under their very eyes: the fact that a good many of the Westerners at Amsterdam were, as sociologists, relatively uninterested in the dialogue with the East and in the central political experience of our time. As citizens, of course, they were glad to listen. But as social scientists, they remained curiously uninvolved.

THOSE in the West who took the initiative in the conversations with the East were, philosophically, highly assorted. There were Catholics, existentialists, liberals; and in great numbers, Marxists, neo-Marxists, ex-Marxists. Politically, the divergences were fewer: the "democratic left" of a number of countries was much in evidence. And all those eager for conversation with the East seemed to share the view that sociology's scientific work begins, as paradoxical as it sounds, only in historical urgency and political commitment. Before you can describe history objectively, they held, you had to live in it. Many of their colleagues took the opposite view: that sociology was a science like any other, and that their own involvement in its subject matter was of small account. Perhaps my own sympathies mislead me, but I have the impression that the pallid papers at Amsterdam came from this latter group. Faced

with the theme "Social Change in the 20th Century," they dropped an iron curtain of their own across their desks, and separated their political concerns from their scientific interests.

Even the locale of the Congress had political implications for those who looked about them. Not only is Amsterdam a charming city: its history reminds us of the historical effectiveness of bourgeois democracy. The Netherlands today is a free society which has obtained a welfare state while learning to live amid considerable political and social tension. During the Congress, in fact, the country was undergoing a cabinet crisis. The building in which the Congress met had its own historical associations; now called the Royal Institute for the Tropics, it was still known to streetcar conductors and hotel porters as the "Colonial Institute."

The formal organization of the Congress was not entirely conducive to conversation, whether between East and West or anyone else. There were too many plenary sessions: a conversation among six hundred scholars is—perhaps luckily—impossible. And the smaller working groups into which the plenary sessions dissolved were often preempted by professors suffering from a common occupational ailment: an over estimation of the importance of their own words. But Dutch hospitality was immense and there was a large number of receptions. And the sidewalk cafés and Oriental restaurants in which Amsterdam abounds provided other opportunities for talk.

And it was talk that interested most of the delegates. Unlike scholarly gatherings in the United States, European and international meetings are not academic track meets with jobs and research grants as the prizes. The hunt for prestige, of course, is not absent from international congresses, and scholars outside the United States are no less eager than their American colleagues for its tangible benefits. But academic entrepreneurship abroad is more subtly done, more disguised, while the younger men have little to occupy them beside their immediate tasks, since jobs and grants are so few anyhow.

Talk, however, requires language. French and English were the official Congress languages, but German was more useful in dealing with most of the East Europeans. The worst linguists at the Congress were not the Americans, British, or French (most of whom seemed to assume that God had spoken to

Adam in their own tongue) but the Russians. The old Russian intelligentsia was at home in French and German; their Stalinist successors overworked their interpreters.

Conversation began over the formal papers. These were uneven in quality and the arrangements for discussion were cumbersome, but they were the first things the delegates had to talk about. The papers covered an astonishing variety of topics. Opening my program at random, I found "Changes in Family Structure in the Baltic Islands," "The Working Class in the British Social Structure," "Some Problems of Rural Collective Settlements in Indonesia." Economic organization, the distribution of property, class structure, family systems, education, agricultural tenure—these were the main themes on the program. Politics as such was surprisingly absent, despite the recent revival of interest in political sociology. But as we shall see, it intruded itself quickly enough.

IT WAS in the formal sessions that the delegates first encountered the Communists. The Russian contributions precluded real conversation. Propagandistic tracts, they were written in a tone defiant of contradiction or even question. We were told of the Soviet Union's democratic electoral law, of wide popular participation in political decision, of the equality of individuals before Soviet law—claims not requiring comment. The Soviet speakers referred rarely to problems in their own society, and then usually as "survivals" of the bourgeois era. They hardly cited statistics, and their discussions were so diffuse that they scarcely touched on those spheres in which many were less skeptical of Soviet claims of progress, like education and medicine.

But the Soviet delegation did have some notion of the kind of questions that would really interest their Western colleagues: those dealing with a class system in the "classless" society. This is the kind of thing they prepared: "The equality of citizens, firmly established in the norms of socialist law, does not however mean equalization either of the amount of payment for work or in the fields of needs and everyday capacities, as sometimes ill-informed people imagine. Equality under socialism means equal relation of everyone to the means of production and equal duty on the part of everyone to work according to his or her abilities, and an equal right of all the working people to receive compensation in accordance with

their labor. Such a proposition does not exclude any property differences among the citizens of the socialist state or considerable differences in the organization of everyday life and the character of the requirements that are to be met. These property differences result, however, not from the fact that the sources of the citizens' incomes are different, but exclusively and wholly from the fact that the compensation paid is fixed according to quantity and quality of work performed. It is individual work that is the source of income in every case."

It is, of course, nonsense to suppose that a member of the Soviet cabinet, making a decision about the economy, and an ordinary worker—bound to do as told—enjoy "equal relations to the means of production." And if commissar and peasant both live by their work, and not off inherited capital, what may we say of the different advantages they can bestow upon their children? The statement quoted admits the existence of class differences in income and culture in all but name. But it ignores their implications. Yet the paper in which it was contained was about the most honest of all the Soviet contributions, formal and informal, at Amsterdam. The Soviet delegates could not allow themselves to see their society as it was—or at any rate they could not talk about their real perceptions. They did not even have any very advanced techniques for gaining information about their society: their statistics were minimal and fragmentary and they seemed to have done little empirical research.

Soviet ideological fervor provoked some unfortunate reactions from the West. One American professor announced that his researches demonstrated that successful businessmen in America were self-made men, that the American myth of success was substantially correct. This did not attract quite the attention it deserved in view of the fact that everybody else's researches showed quite the opposite. Another American declared that we no longer had a working class, only a "labor force." This attempt to match Soviet skill in altering facts by renaming them was resisted by no less a figure than Talcott Parsons of Harvard.

The satellite delegates were much less bound by ideological straitjackets than the Russians. The Poles' entire appearance foreshadowed, on an intellectual plane, the political explosion in Warsaw in October. They issued

reports on research into the structure of their society; they brought along non-Marxist professors, who quarreled publicly and privately with their colleagues; they invited Western sociologists to teach and do research in Poland. The Czechs, who were not sociologists, collected bibliographies and books on recent inquiries into Western society. Their questions showed them to be well informed and critical. Even the then Hungarian Minister of Justice, Molnar, who was largely circumspect and silent (and, as if he anticipated the imminent revolution, depressed), said that he had come to renew contacts with "bourgeois science." The East Germans insisted on their pleasure at being in Amsterdam. One of them said that, until recently, Karl Mannheim's books had been *verboden* in his university. Mannheim was, of course, the most brilliant of Weimar Germany's neo-Marxist sociologists. Any Marxist regime but a Stalinist one might have encouraged the study of his work.

THE informal contacts at the Congress were, therefore, most illuminating for the Westerners, and possibly for the Communists as well. The Russians were very sociable, an improvement on their reported behavior at congresses even two years ago, but it was difficult to exchange more than pleasantries with them. One of them expressed sheer bewilderment at the frequent references to the "middle classes" in Western papers. "Why aren't the categories 'bourgeoisie' and 'proletariat' good enough?" he asked. "Where do the 'middle classes' come in?" Others answered questions, not hostile or pointed but sheerly factual ones about Soviet society, in highly general, almost formula-like terms. They seemed on the defensive and ill at ease. The French sociologists, however, were reasonably satisfied after a private meeting with the Russians. But I gather that the French did most of the talking.

The Poles, on the other hand, were remarkably frank. Even the Marxists among them (and two of the professors present were members of the Central Committee of the United Workers party, the Polish version of the Communist party) seemed to prefer associating with the Westerners rather than the Russians. And the non-Marxists made no secret of their differences with their colleagues: at a private meeting with an American-British group the Poles argued violently among themselves on the methodology of the social sciences. One of

the Polish Communists, and not the least of them, when asked to explain the difference between the behavior of his delegation and the immobility of the Russians, exclaimed: "It's simple. They've had thirty years of it and we only ten."

The Poles were anxious to import Western sociological research techniques—the Marxists simply because of their value as techniques, and the non-Marxists because they see them as an opening for a more critical general sociology. One Marxist professor, who deplored "anecdotal empirical sociology," hoped to combine the measurement of social phenomena with a "reformulated and completed" Marxist theory. The Poles planned to send students to America and Britain (a number are already in France) and they began arranging for academic visits to Poland by Western professors. It would be unfortunate if the only Western visitors they got were social research technicians. However skilled the technicians, they are unlikely to infuse Polish students and professors with a new vision of society to replace the Marxist one.

The Poles were the most active and interesting of the satellites at Amsterdam precisely because they were so free of satellite intellectual characteristics. The Czechs and East Germans were as reasonable and receptive as the Poles in private, but they read no public papers. (One Polish paper, by Professor Osowski, was the initial sensation of the Congress. Its author, a non-Marxist, analyzed the class structure of the present Communist societies in unadorned terms.) The Bulgarians and Rumanians went around talking about peace and international cooperation. The vice president of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, who accompanied the Minister of Justice, was sufficiently unimpressed by the official company he kept to explain that he was not personally a Marxist.

Of all the Communist delegations, the Yugoslavs were the freest. Unlike many of the Russians, all the Yugoslavs were genuine scholars, at home in sociology even if primarily economists or lawyers. They were Marxists, but they put observed facts into the Marxist vocabulary rather than insisting on the vocabulary and ignoring the facts. And they seemed more varied, more distinctive as personalities than the Russians—although perhaps this impression is the result of a political judgment. They distinguished themselves in the

two special sessions on Marxism and the interpretation of social change in the 20th century, sessions that were, in many respects, the highlights of the Congress.

THESE sessions developed because a group of younger French and Italian sociologists wanted to discuss Marxism with their colleagues in general, and with the East Europeans in particular. Their motives were political as well as intellectual. One of the Italians was a Communist (although he publicly told a Russian that in his opinion Stalinism was the work of a social stratum and not of one man), and others were Nenni Socialists. The French intelligentsia, and not least the social scientists, are fascinated with Marxism; this reflects their ambivalence toward the French Communist party. It also reflects the persistence of an indigenously French socialist tradition on which Marx himself drew. (The French intellectual has been defined as somebody who would not make love to a girl with whose politics he disagreed. That seems exaggerated. But many French intellectuals can simultaneously debate supporting the Communists and speculate as to how many days they personally could survive a Communist seizure of power.)

This group was joined by another, which held that Marxism was a set of hypotheses like any other, even if a remarkably useful one; therefore, if the meeting were not to degenerate into scholasticism, it ought to provide opportunities for a critique of Marxism. This initial divergence of purpose led to some misunderstanding, but it also opened the way for a more stimulating and penetrating discussion than would have been possible had either group monopolized these sessions.

The first meeting, lasting four hours in the most smoke-filled of rooms, was egalitarian, even comradely. Some twenty-five speakers took the floor, unannounced and largely unprepared, for five minutes each. There was confusion and repetition at first, though enlivened by pronounced national differences in rhetoric and style. The French made even the most banal of observations sound like something from Pascal. The Americans clothed logic in casualness. The Southern Europeans were uniformly intense. The Germans, although well represented, were surprisingly silent. Most of the speakers were Westerners, although three Yugoslavs made a great impression. By midnight the discussion had begun to con-

verge on a number of points. At the beginning it was a series of monologues. Later, however, the participants began to talk to each other. What did they say?

Marx had predicted that society would split into two completely antagonistic classes, that an impoverished and humiliated working class would unite to overthrow the exploiting class. But industrial society had developed a new middle class not identical with the exploiting one. The working class was itself internally differentiated and, in the advanced industrial countries, demonstrably richer. Extreme economic differences between the working and middle classes were now gone in these countries. In some, the workers had either become "bourgeois" or accepted bourgeois leadership. The revolution, in other words, had either failed to occur, or had taken forms not foreseen by Marx.

Marx had, further, viewed political power as a simple function of economic power. The state, he claimed, was an executive committee for the bourgeoisie. Yet in our time the state had frequently altered the balance of economic power between the classes to the workers' advantage. And in Soviet Russia, the state itself had become a massive exploiting agency. Also, Marx had written of "alienation," of men's estrangement from the vital and healthy potentialities of their own nature. Alienation, Marx implied, would supply the psychological dynamic for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist society. But alienation has, in our time, produced horrible political movements and not that brotherly commonwealth envisaged by the early socialists and—despite his professed scientific amorality—Marx himself. Finally, both Asiatic and Western speakers asserted that the problem of exploitation had shifted largely to the colonial sphere, where new forms of imperialism required new ways of analysis.

These things were said in a Marxist temper, in the conviction that much in the Marxist method was still viable, and that even Marx's mistakes had been fruitful. Even an anti-Marxist could agree with this last. But some critical voices were raised to ask why, if Marx had made so many concrete mistakes, it was still necessary to take him as anything but a historic figure. No clear answer was really attempted. There was, to be sure, some discussion as to whether Marxism as a method of sociological analysis necessarily entailed accept-

ance of dialectical materialism as a philosophy. There was also much talk about removing the mythological elements from Marxism. But unfortunately, no one could say why some intellectuals should have made a myth of what was something else in Marx's hands.

ALL of this was on a fairly general plane—until more immediate problems made an insistent appearance. A Pole spoke of revising Marxist—by which he meant Stalinist—analyses of contemporary society. All that he could propose was that we should now attribute Nazism to the “petty bourgeoisie” rather than to the “monopoly capitalists.” He added that the Polish Communists were now willing to accept the “honorable capitulation” of the Polish “kulaks,” and sat down. (The more “flexible” of the Polish Marxists had avoided these sessions, intimating that they did not want to come into direct conflict with the Russians. But the speaker showed that not all Poles were flexible.) The Yugoslavs caused a stir by insisting that even nominally socialistic states could behave imperialistically toward other socialist states, and they argued that it was the task of Marxists to prevent the development of new forms of domination imposed in the name of socialism. Their references were clear—yet the Russian speaker referred later to the “valuable” comments of the Yugoslavs.

An American, Professor S. M. Lipset (a COMMENTARY contributor) described Stalinism as simply a mode of enforced industrialization. Lipset recalled the controversy over industrialization in the Soviet Union in the 1920's and he cited the views of both Bukharin and Trotsky, important participants in that controversy. The Russian speaker later declared that his delegation “did not find it necessary” to enter into discussion with anyone who quoted Bukharin and Trotsky.

Perhaps the Russian—he was editor of the Soviet trade union newspaper *Trud*—really believed that these two old Bolsheviks had been imperialist agents. His reaction was, in any case, a striking reminder of the survival of many of the most repugnant features of Stalinism. He drew a laugh from the audience, involuntarily, by assuring them that he was pleased to see knowledge of Marxism growing outside the Communist countries! He made a gesture, at least, towards real conversation with the West by declaring that there was much “merit” in a question by Professor Georges

Friedmann, the distinguished French scholar who was elected President of the International Sociological Association. Friedmann had declared that workers in Russia did subordinate and laborious work, like workers everywhere; did this not affect their attitudes even in a “socialist” society? The Russian speaker, despite his cordiality, did not answer the question.

The delegates left the session exhausted but satisfied. The Yugoslavs were nearly everybody's heroes. They seemed to be those Marxists without myth demanded by the speakers. And they talked the language of democratic and utopian socialism. Nobody mentioned Djilas and Dedijer, who had been persecuted for trying to persuade the Yugoslav Communist party to pursue those goals.* In general, that evening, people spoke softly.

A SECOND meeting provided much more open conflict. There were four speakers: Professor Raymond Aron of Paris, S. M. Lipset, the Hungarian Justice Minister, Molnar, and a Yugoslav law professor, Rudolph Legradic. Lipset made a reference to the view that industrial development might have taken place in Russia even if the Czarist regime had continued. This infuriated the Russian spokesman, who had returned for more, and he ignored Lipset's real points. One of them, on the Stalinist bureaucracy, was made later by an Italian Communist and found at least nominal acceptance by the Russian. The Yugoslav had, indeed, opened the evening with a discourse on the dangers of bureaucracy and an astonishingly utopian demand for the elimination of the state.

Aron began by remarking that a dialogue between East and West was desirable, and that it might be easier if the East were to stop jailing and executing opponents. He declared that Western Europe and America were now welfare societies and had surpassed Soviet Russia in providing for their members—at infinitely less human and moral cost. The Russian, in his reply, rightly recalled his country's late start and wartime losses. The rest of Aron's points escaped him.

Molnar's manner was singular. His very brief statement fell into two distinct parts. He

*Djilas was arrested in Belgrade last month following publication of an article by him in the *New Leader* criticizing the Yugoslav Communists for failing to support the Hungarian revolution.—ED.

began by saying that a superficial look at Communist countries might lead us to suppose that they were characterized by unequal control of the means of production, by a dictatorship not of but over the proletariat. That would be a mistake, he declared, and in the second half of his talk he told us that behind this deceptive and depressing mask lay the true and just face of social revolution. Some people had the impression that he himself nevertheless inclined privately towards the first view. Or perhaps he was simply looking at things dialectically: he did tell Aron to read Hegel.

Thus the second session on Marxism left the sphere of abstractions and dealt in hard and disputed realities. It was not alone ideas that were argued about, but the actual structure of human society. And the arguments were political, about the uses to which power was being put. This underscored the remoteness of a good deal of the Congress program. In the last analysis, knowledge about society—or the refusal of such knowledge—is something we need in order to attain political aims. And, quite apart from our aims, politics is frequently a decisive category of change in social structure.

What began, then, as detached intellectual analysis became a political controversy. And the sociologists, despite their theoretical structures and research techniques, found themselves arguing in the same terms as everybody else, even if they had an acuter sense of the social limitations on political decision. It is now, perhaps, a bit clearer why many Western sociologists retain an interest in Marxism despite Marx's mistakes. For Marxism treats society in terms historical in conception and political in application. And it was a political contact with history that they were seeking, a search which led them into the dialogue with the East.

THE Amsterdam Congress, then, gave rise to a number of reflections—many of them bearing on the political relevance of social science both in the West and in the Communist countries. Our conversations with our Communist colleagues have now been overshadowed by the dramatic and moving events in Poland and Hungary (and by the time this appears, perhaps elsewhere as well). We thought we were glimpsing a world in motion. Actually, it was a world about to explode. The mixed despair and hope with which our colleagues talked showed us that to them, de-

Stalinization was a matter of spiritual life and death. The reactions of an official like Molnar, or of the restive delegates from countries not openly defiant of Stalinism (the Czechs and East Germans), were as instructive—in their own way—as the outspokenness of a man like Professor Hochfeld of Warsaw, who came to Amsterdam in the midst of his parliamentary struggle for socialist democracy.

Our experience at Amsterdam, and the things it foreshadowed, confirmed David Riesman's criticism of the Orwellian exaggeration of the omnipotence of totalitarian rule. Through the blackest period of Stalinism many East European intellectuals, whether Marxist or not, persisted in thinking. The difference between the satellite intellectuals and the Russians, however, was disheartening. It is sobering to recall the Pole's remark on the effects of thirty, as opposed to ten, years of Stalinism.

The immediate evidence available to us at Amsterdam, of course, concerned the fate of social inquiry in the intermediate phase of de-Stalinization. Looking back, we can now see how the forces mobilized about this issue reflected underlying political conflicts. Social inquiry as such was rejected by Stalinism: had not Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin discovered, once and for all, the laws governing social events? As Stalinist controls loosened, the Communist policy-makers were either confused or at odds on allowing the resumption of social inquiry. Some may have thought that non-Marxist or critical Marxist sociologists could be allowed their say, in the expectation that they would gradually die out. But those we met at Amsterdam were busy reproducing themselves, intellectually, by writing and teaching. Then again, social inquiry may prove an indispensable instrument of government. Public opinion surveys and studies of industrial relations, never undertaken by the Stalinists, may be precisely what a Gomulka needs.

A general turn from dogmatic rigidity in social and economic policy in some of the Soviet bloc countries, then, seems to be leading to a renewal of empirical inquiry. But empirical inquiry itself may encourage some Communists to look anew at their assumptions. A good deal of modern Western sociology originated in the effort to grasp the limits of Marxism. A similar large-scale effort in Eastern Europe is still in the future. But at Amsterdam we witnessed stirrings in this direction, and recent political events (themselves partly the

result of intellectual dissent) may open new perspectives. The anxieties of the Stalinist die-hards are easy enough to understand. Once permitted in a limited way, inquiry of this sort can break all bounds.

For the present, we can expect a pronounced increase in concrete research programs in Eastern Europe. The Poles began before Gomulka's return, the Czechs and East Germans are in contact with the Poles, and the Yugoslav experience fits this pattern. (One Yugoslav at Amsterdam asked to meet some Western industrial sociologists. I told him that many of us in the West thought that some of our industrial research was ideologically biased. His answer was: "I know ideology when I see it: it's the techniques and the facts I want.") The Easterners are turning to the West for scientific assistance and collaboration. What attitude ought Western social scientists, and intellectuals generally, adopt to these requests?

It is practically our duty, I think, to accede to them. Technical issues are hard to distinguish from substantive ones. We ought to be clear that such collaboration is a political act. But unless, in the face of all recent evidence, we cling to a demonological image of the Communist regimes, we can proceed with a good conscience. Communist opinion in East Europe is far from monolithic. The recent struggles in these countries began when the Communist intellectuals seized upon the Khrushchev speech to open an attack on totalitarianism on many fronts. Many of the people we help will have taken considerable risks. Many others, in countries that have yet to go as far, are prepared to do so. Scholarly collaboration is, at once, the repayment of a debt of honor to those who have won their first battles and a gesture of encouragement to those who may tomorrow find themselves in desperate struggle.

The most important thing we can do is simple enough. It is to keep talking, to keep open our lines of intellectual communication with the East. And conversation may affect those who listen to it as well as those who participate in it. It was noticeable at Amsterdam that the Western Communists seemed to feel themselves closer to their Western colleagues than to their Soviet comrades—especially after the Soviet speeches.

It would be futile, of course, to expect very much in the way of conversation from Stalin's professors. The "thaw" in Russia has yet to

melt any number of icebergs in the social sciences. But conversation with Stalin's professors may be the price for the chance to talk to their students, who have noticed their teachers' discomfiture. (The old Bolshevik intellectuals who came to the Congress from Moscow were a good deal more accessible than their middle-aged colleagues, and the rising generation ought to be more accessible still.) And if a certain amount of tact is the price for talking with the Russians at all, then it may be well to consider paying it. "Tactlessness," of course, may also bring gains and it may be a gain to upset a Soviet ideologue—not least to the ideologue himself.

TOTALITARIAN societies repress their own social conflicts, or their leaders may invent pseudo-conflicts to avoid the real ones. In any case, no social science is possible. In free societies, the fact that conflicts are not forcibly repressed allows them to be expressed in social science itself. But the Western social scientist, in these conditions, may find it difficult to see things as they really are. He may mistake an issue involving the fundamental nature and freedom of social science for a professional difference over methods and approach. Both Eastern and Western sociologists agreed at Amsterdam that there were objective laws governing social life. The Communists claim to have discovered them in Marxism. This claim, in Stalinist hands, became an ideological justification for exploitation and tyranny. The resistance of the Stalinists to empirical inquiry (a resistance which would have been repugnant to Marx himself) is of course due to their fear of disproof of their claim. Social inquiry, under Stalinism, was really something subversive.

But what about Western claims? Many Westerners at Amsterdam were themselves not free of ideology. It took the form of supposing that the laws governing social life lie very near the surface, just awaiting discovery. One more inquiry (and one more grant) and there they'd be—lacking only suitably simplified packaging for freshman courses. Part of this is simply a professional attitude: sociologists need to convince themselves, and university administrators, that they really are entirely distinct from economists, historians, political scientists, and, above all, philosophers. But something else was at work.

The notion that we can begin our search

for the laws of social life just anywhere rejects a good many lessons, of which the Amsterdam Congress was only the latest. A sociology that proceeds from one randomly chosen inquiry to another may be fleeing social conflict. Our task is to see our society as a whole. Inquiries subversive in the East may in the West be simply evasive. Amsterdam, then, may have reminded some of the Westerners of the problem of significance in their work. It may have turned them away from excessive preoccupation with the model of the physical sciences. A nominally free social science that is unaware of its roots in conflict may remain chained. The very measure of the strength of social science may lie in the way it diagnoses specific social conflicts which are the essence of the society in which it functions. Our frank admission of uncertainty may be our strongest weapon in the attempt to enlarge the dialogue

with those minds in the East now struggling for their freedom.

Postscript. The tragic and brutal destruction of the Hungarian revolution by the Red Army demands a melancholy postscript. Professors and students alike were conspicuous in the local revolutionary committees. Organized student groups fought alongside the army and the workers' militia in the streets and, according to the last despairing broadcasts from Hungary, fought to the end. Public criticism of Stalinism in Rakosi's Hungary began, we may recall, with pronouncements by the Budapest intellectuals. And the Academy of Sciences used Hungary's few brief days of freedom to appeal to scholarly bodies elsewhere for aid. Molnar, meanwhile, has disappeared: he was a member neither of Nagy's national front government nor of Kadar's puppet regime.

SONNET

YEHUDA AMICHAÏ

THE thoughts came to him like long lines
of freight,
a convoy of supplies before the battle.
They came to him in order, one by one,
and while he was unloading them, he
thought

them out in sentences, in neat array.
The shots were commas, full stops, dots
above

the i's. The earth exploded just when they
had crusted silently my wounds of love.

And in the spring, he felt his fingers tingle,
like branches of a tree, with blossoming,
and he prepared for fruit. But in the fall,

twice wounded in his legs, twisting, he fell
to earth; like Balaam, falling, could foretell
the story of my days, and sang the blessing.

YEHUDA AMICHAÏ, a leading young poet of Israel, came to that country in 1936 from Germany (where he was born in 1924). He has published one volume of verse, *Achshav U-v'yamim Ha-acherim* ("Now and in the Other Days"). The sonnet we print was translated from the Hebrew by Robert Friend of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.